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HEROES

CHAPTER 75 A LESSON IN ELECTRICITY

The only major writing on the mystery of Ben Franklin's famous kite flying experiment comes from Joseph Priestly's account, published fifteen years afterwards. Franklin made many major discoveries in his lifetime, but some details he chose to keep to himself.

A LESSON IN ELECTRICITY

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From the journal of Joseph Priestley.
November 8, 1767.

TING
T-TING

It is with great apprehension
that I write this entry...

NNGGHHH...
BENJAMIN....

TING
TING
TING

...but after several
years of secrecy
and consternation,
I feel the truth
must be explored.

BENJAMIN?
THOSE INFERNAL
BELLS OF YOURS
ARE RINGING
AGAIN! BEN?!

The truth about a colleague
and dear friend of mine...

BEN! YOUR
BELLS!

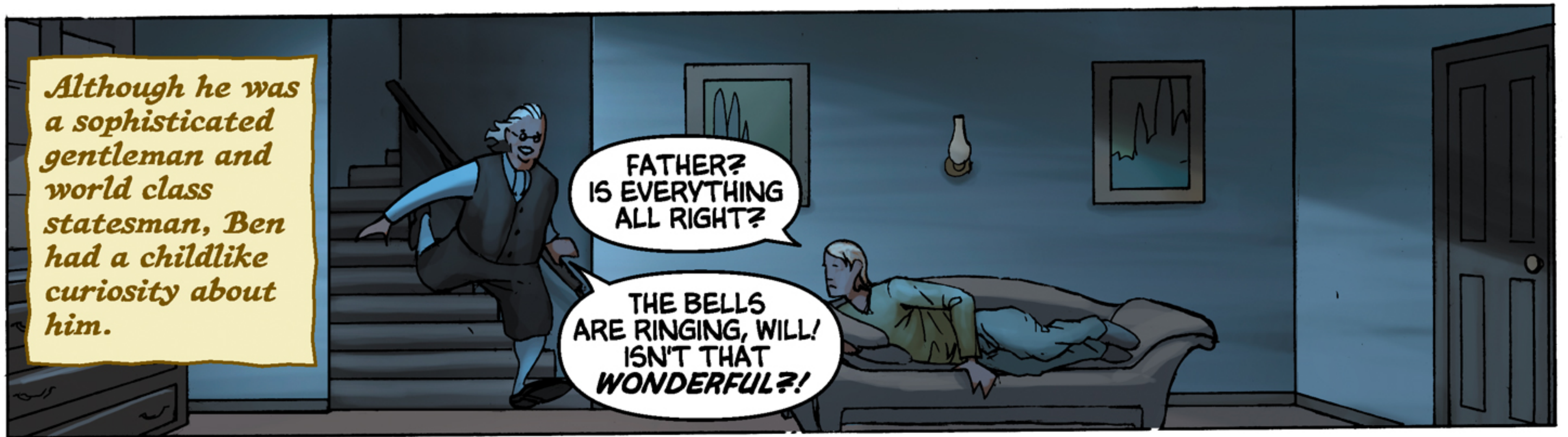
...Benjamin
Franklin...

HNH?
I--WHU--MY--
MY BELLS? WHAT
DO YOU MEAN MY--

MY
BELLS!

...And his famous
experiment that
changed our
understanding of
electricity
forever.

CAN'T YOU
INVENT A QUIETER
WAY TO CONDUCT
YOUR EXPER--



Although he was a sophisticated gentleman and world class statesman, Ben had a childlike curiosity about him.

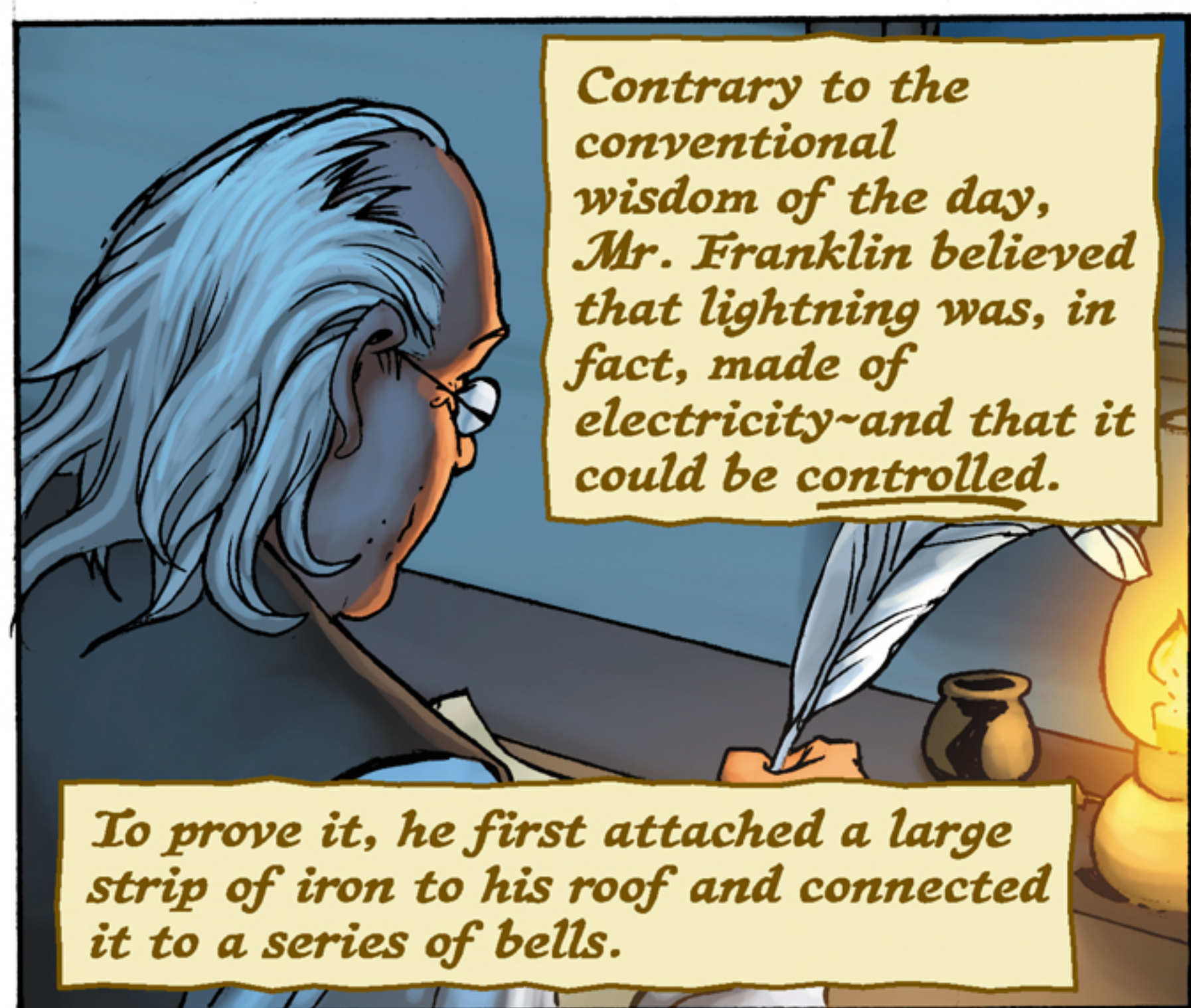
FATHER?
IS EVERYTHING
ALL RIGHT?

THE BELLS
ARE RINGING, WILL!
ISN'T THAT
WONDERFUL?!



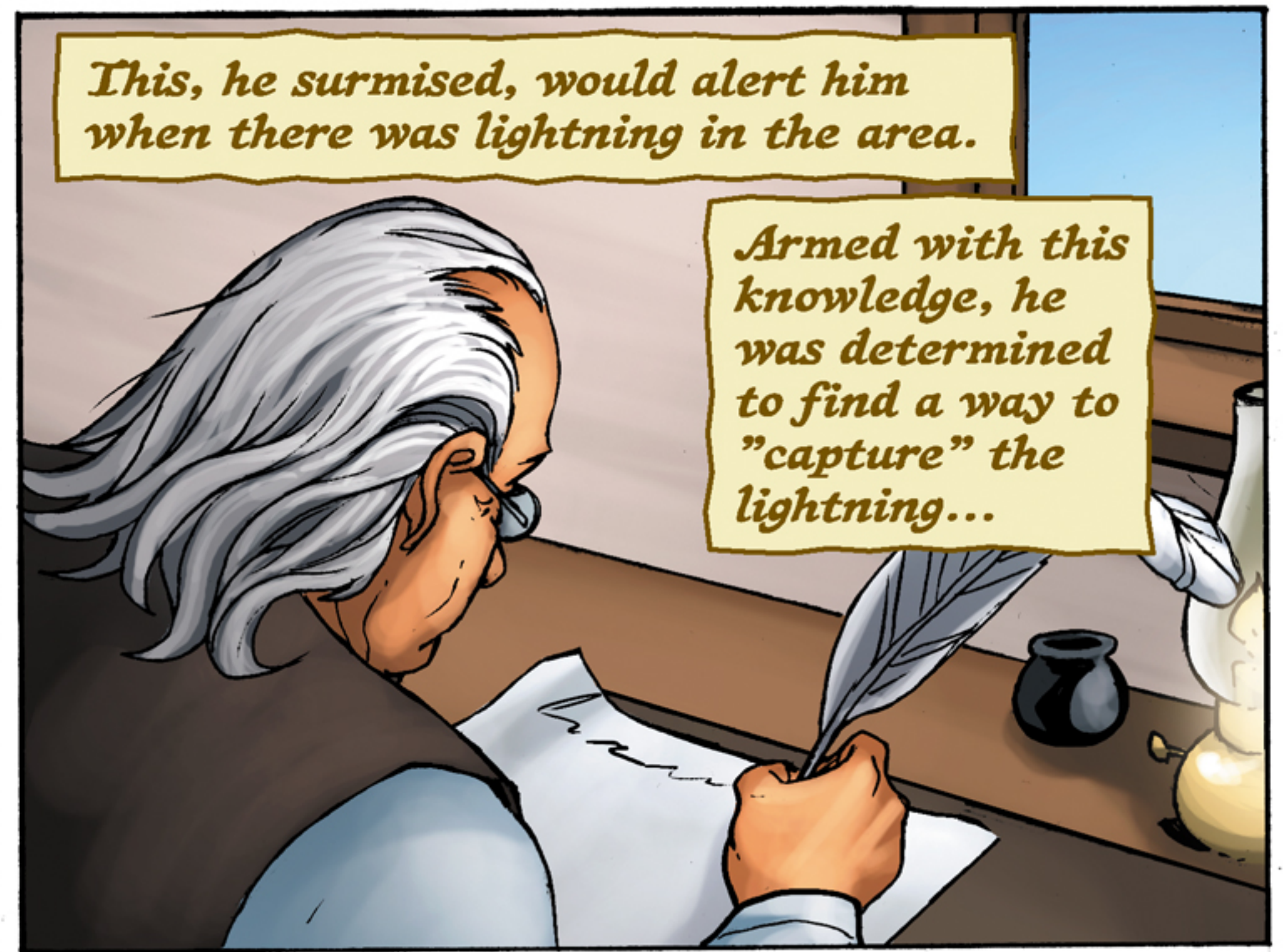
He relished every small discovery, and, once he was interested, needed to thoroughly understand anything and everything about a myriad of topics...

...including, in this case, lightning.



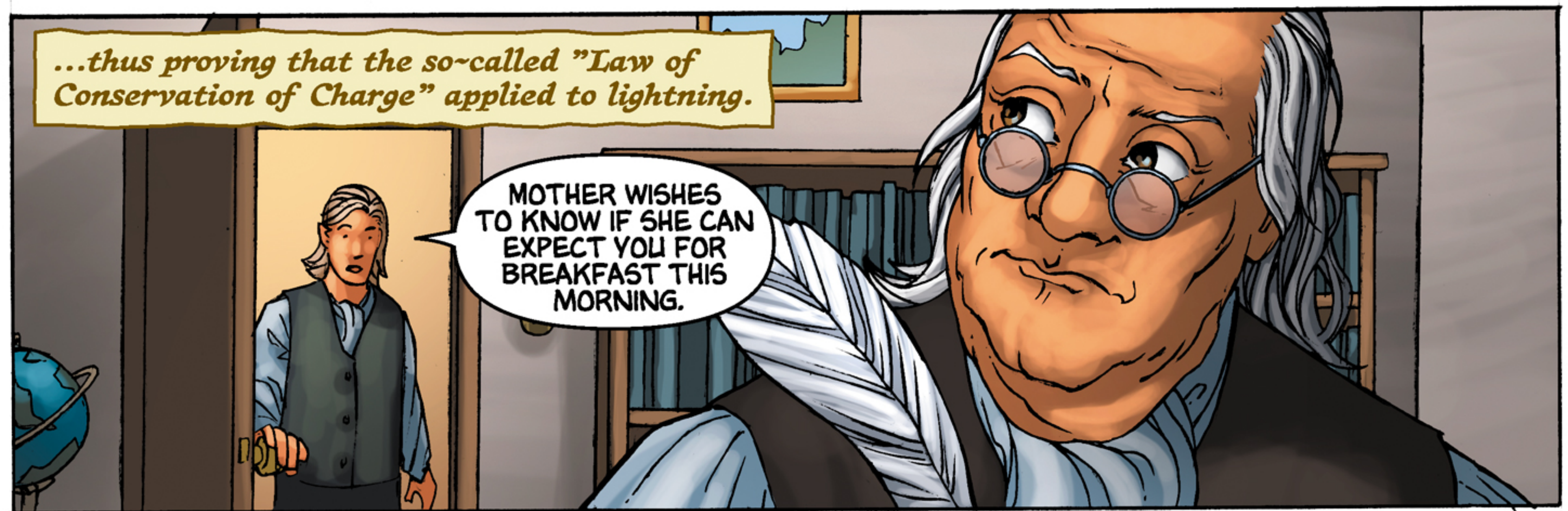
Contrary to the conventional wisdom of the day, Mr. Franklin believed that lightning was, in fact, made of electricity~and that it could be controlled.

To prove it, he first attached a large strip of iron to his roof and connected it to a series of bells.



This, he surmised, would alert him when there was lightning in the area.

Armed with this knowledge, he was determined to find a way to "capture" the lightning...



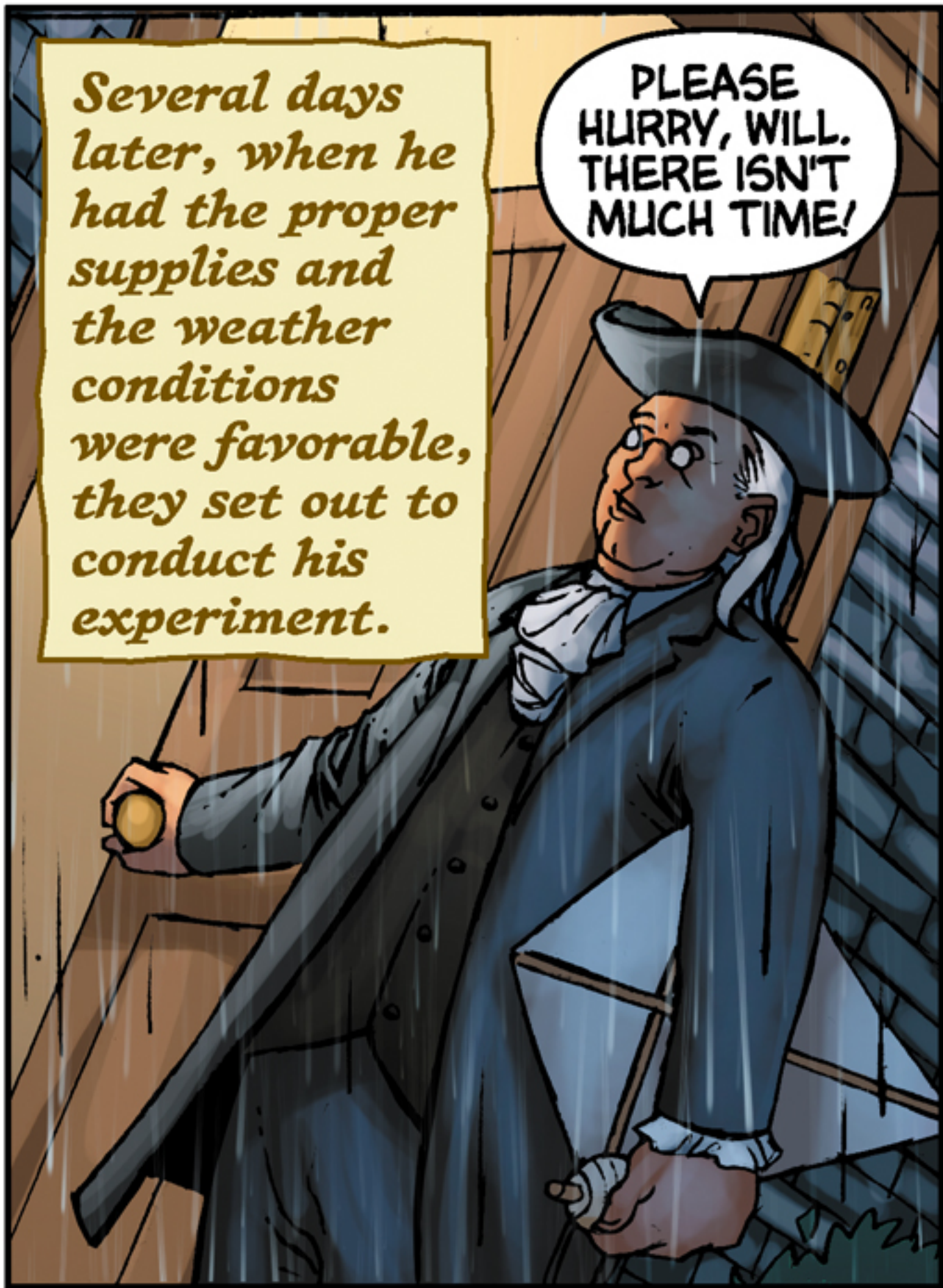
...thus proving that the so-called "Law of Conservation of Charge" applied to lightning.

MOTHER WISHES
TO KNOW IF SHE CAN
EXPECT YOU FOR
BREAKFAST THIS
MORNING.



But to do so, he was going to need some help.

AH, WILLIAM.
I'M GLAD YOU'RE
HERE. THERE'S
SOMETHING I NEED
TO SPEAK WITH
YOU ABOUT...



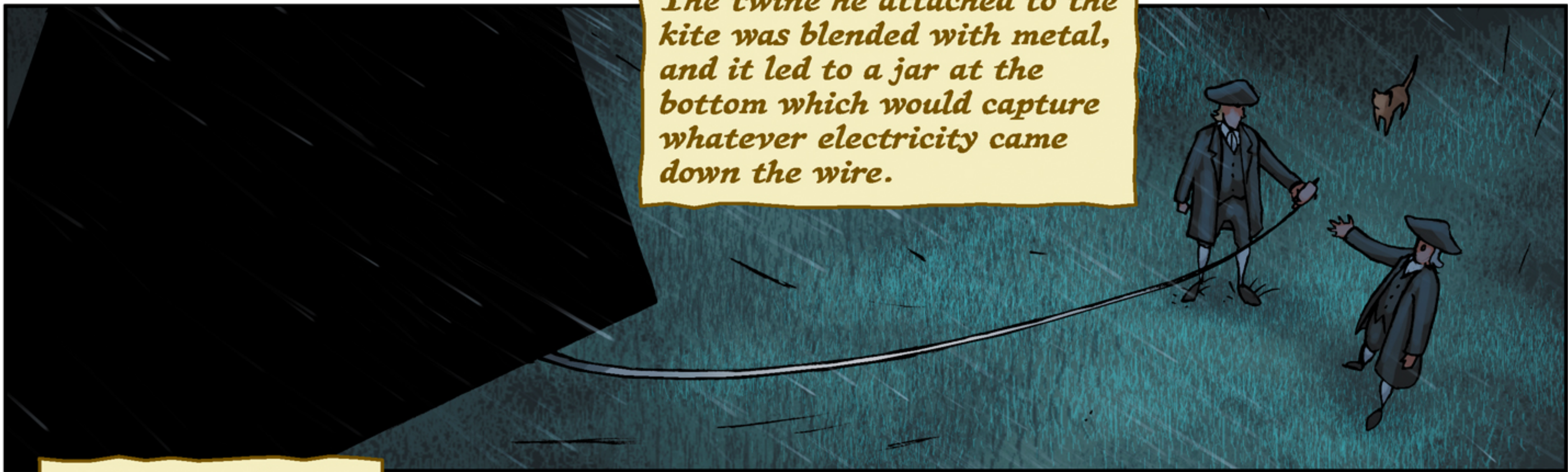


To prove his thesis, Franklin realized that he needed to figure out a way to bring the lightning to him.

So, as everyone eventually learned, he chose a simple kite with a key attached to it.



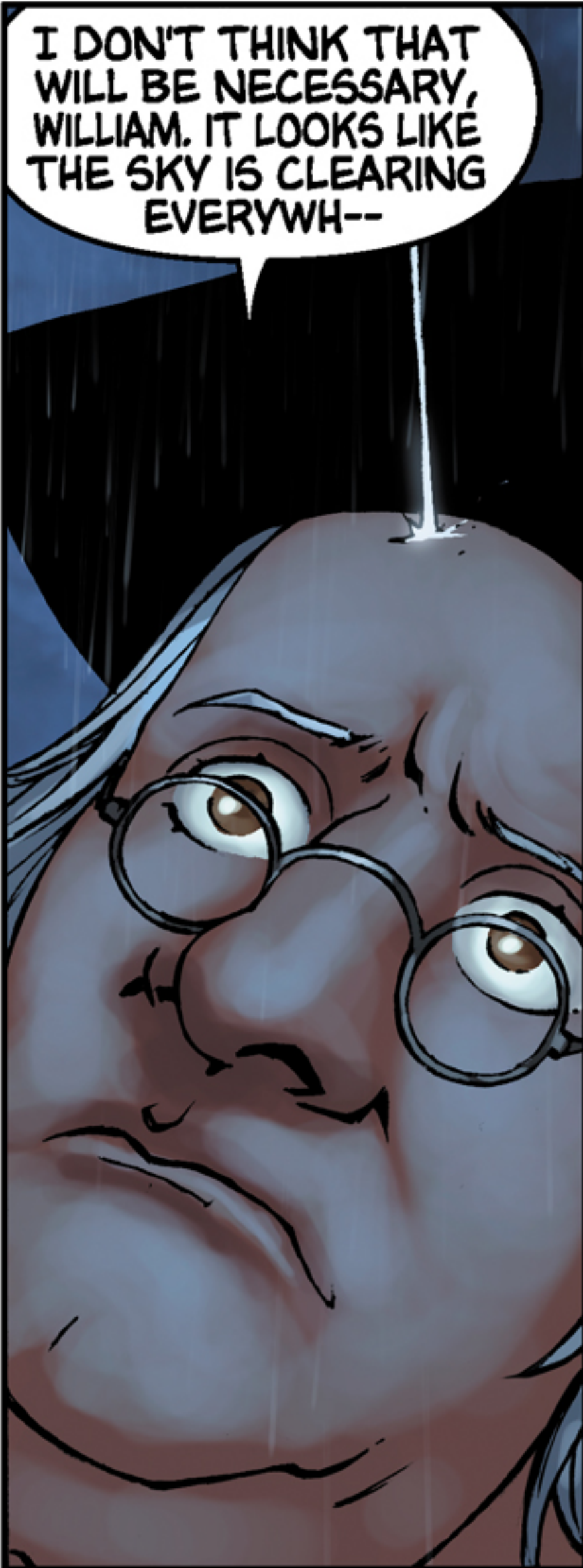
The twine he attached to the kite was blended with metal, and it led to a jar at the bottom which would capture whatever electricity came down the wire.



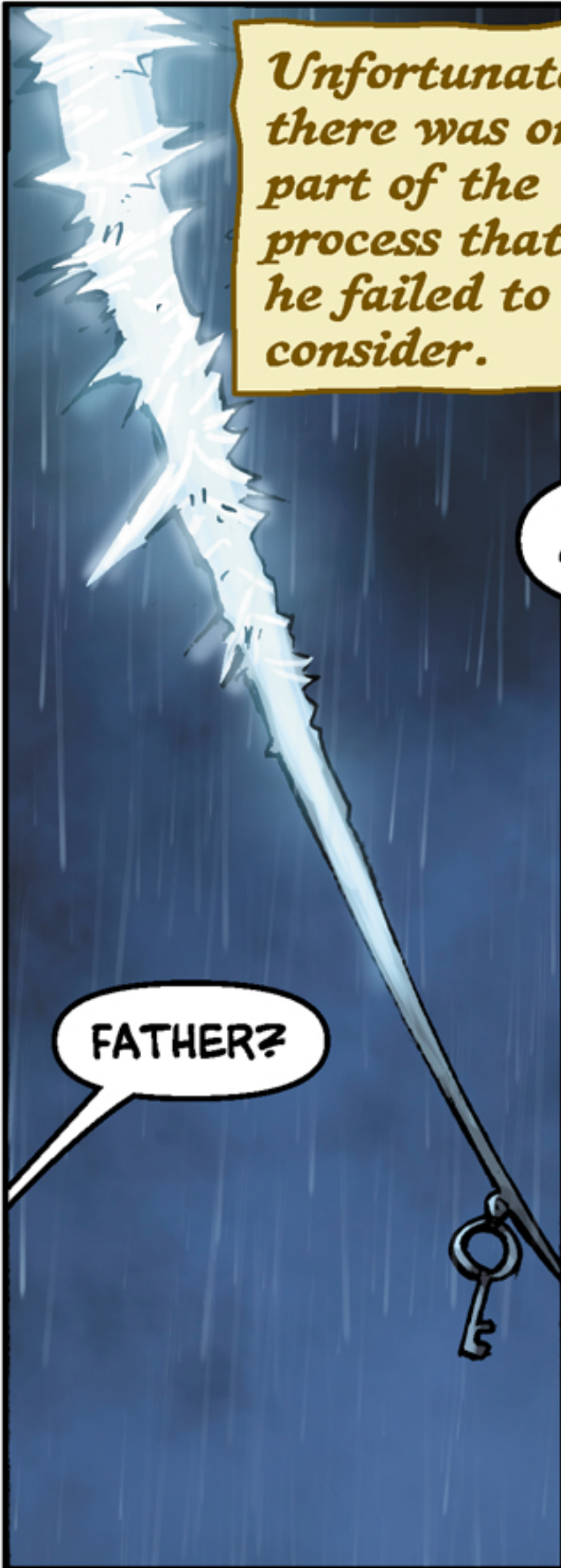
To prevent electrocution, he attached a dry silk string to the metal cord, effectively insulating him from the charge of the key.



SHOULD WE TRY TO FIND A DIFFERENT LOCATION, FATHER?



I DON'T THINK THAT WILL BE NECESSARY, WILLIAM. IT LOOKS LIKE THE SKY IS CLEARING EVERYWH--



FATHER?



Unfortunately there was one part of the process that he failed to consider.

DO YOU FEEL SOMETHING--?

He never proposed the question, what if the dry string...was wet?



Although he conducted his experiment in 1752, it wasn't until 15 years later that he made the public aware of it, in a letter to me.

People often ask me why it took so long for him to tell the world of his great discovery.

I say that it was because he didn't want anyone trying to duplicate such a dangerous experiment, so he kept it to himself until tools became available to make it safer.

But the truth of the matter lies in the part of the story that he made me swear to never repeat.

The part that, to this day, I have never told to another living soul.

That Benjamin, himself, somehow absorbed the charge.

Enough electricity to kill a man.

And he walked away unscathed.

No, the world is not ready for that part of the story yet.

Perhaps it shall never be.